

RIVER BANDITS, ASTROS EXTEND AFFILIATION

Written by Marco LaNave

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Defending Midwest League Champions remain Class-A affiliate in top-rated minor league system DAVENPORT, Iowa (August 26, 2014) – The Quad Cities River Bandits and Houston Astros have signed a two-year extension of their Player Development Contract through the 2016 season. River Bandits owner Dave Heller and Astros President of Business Operations Reid Ryan made the announcement at a press conference Tuesday at Modern Woodmen Park. In their first year of a new affiliation with the Astros in 2013, the River Bandits won the Midwest League Championship and became the first team in Minor League Baseball history to feature consecutive No. 1 overall picks on its roster with shortstop Carlos Correa and pitcher Mark Appel. Entering the 2014 season, those prospects and other current and former River Bandits were among the reasons ESPN.com ranked the Houston Astros minor league system No. 1 in all of baseball. “The last two seasons have been a special time for Quad Cities baseball – from seeing some of the top rising prospects in baseball and major league talent on the field to a Midwest League Championship,” said River Bandits owner Dave Heller. “We are delighted to continue our partnership with the Houston Astros and one of the best minor league systems in baseball.” “This is a very exciting day for the Houston Astros to be able to extend our relationship with Quad Cities and with Dave Heller,” said Astros President of Business Operations Reid Ryan. “What we want to do is have affiliates that are the gold standard of their league, and this facility, the way this community has made our players feel at home, and the extra mile that Dave and the River Bandits have gone – and will continue to go – are what makes this place so special.”

River Bandits from the 2013 and 2014 seasons currently make up seven of the top 10, and 10 of the top 18 prospects in the Houston Astros organization, according to MLB.com. Included are Correa (No. 1), Appel (2), pitchers Lance McCullers (6), Michael Feliz (7) and Vincent Velasquez (8), third baseman Rio Ruiz (9), pitcher Josh Hader (10), outfielder Teoscar Hernandez (11), first baseman A.J. Reed (15), and second baseman Tony Kemp (18). In 2013, the Astros drafted Moline, Ill., native Thomas Lindauer, whose time with the River Bandits this season made him the first Quad Cities-native to play with the Midwest League franchise in 26 years.

With Correa in 2013 and Feliz in 2014, the River Bandits were the only team in Class-A baseball to be represented by a player on its roster each of the last two seasons at the

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SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game.

“We are thrilled to extend our partnership with Dave Heller and his Quad Cities River Bandits organization,” said Astros Director of Player Development Quinton McCracken. “We are extremely excited to rejoin forces with this exciting and progressive ownership group and look forward to our players developing their baseball skills in the unique and picturesque environment at Modern Woodmen Park for years to come.”

In addition to the Astros' minor league talent, four players from the Houston Astros current major league roster – including star rookies in first baseman Jon Singleton and George Springer – have played with Quad Cities in the past two seasons. In addition to Springer, pitchers Josh Fields and Anthony Bass also completed rehab assignments with the River Bandits.

Among the other highlights of the current affiliation with the Astros was a visit to Modern Woodmen Park by Astros Senior Director of Major League Field Operations, Dan Bergstrom – an Ogden, Iowa, native and Iowa State alumnus – to work with the River Bandits grounds crew for three days. The River Bandits this season also gave away bobbleheads to fans of Houston Astros legends Jeff Bagwell, Craig Biggio, Roger Clemens and Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan.

“The Houston Astros have been truly great partners with the River Bandits organization, not only in assembling the team playing in the Quad Cities, but also for their collaboration within their entire organization,” said River Bandits General Manager Andrew Chesser. “We are excited to continue a special relationship by extending the Player Development Contract.”

Prior to the current affiliation, Quad Cities was also a Houston Astros affiliate from 1993 to 1998.

UP NEXT: Fan Appreciation Week continues Thursday is Modern Woodmen Half-Price Night with a River Bandits hat giveaway, and Friday is Fan Appreciation Night with postgame fireworks. Regular tickets are available at www.riverbandits.com